

## Keeping Haida alive through film and drama

Frederick White  
*Slippery Rock University*

The Haida language, of the northwest coast of Canada and Southern Alaska, has been endangered for most of the 20th century. Historically, orthography has been a difficult issue for anyone studying the language, since no standardized orthography existed. In spite of the orthographical issues, current efforts in Canada at revitalizing Haida language and culture have culminated in the theatrical production of *Sinxii'gangu*, a traditional Haida story dramatized and performed completely in Haida. The most recent effort is *Edge of the Knife*, a film about a Haida man transforming into a *gaagiid* (wild man) as a result of losing a child. The story line addresses his restoration back into the community, and as a result, affords not just a resource for two Haida dialects, but also for history and culture. With regards to language, actors participated in two weeks of immersion to prepare and struggled through issues with Haida pronunciation during filming. Using the Haida language exclusively, not just in oral narratives (though there are some in the drama and the film) but in actual dialogue, provides learners with great context for developing strategies for pronunciation and conversation rather than only learning and hearing lexical items and short phrases. Capturing the storyline on film not only supports efforts at revitalization, but provides tangible documentation of both Canadian dialects of the Haida language.

**1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>.** Since Franz Boas began his salvific efforts among Indigenous languages of the Americas (Rosenblum & Berez 2010)<sup>2</sup>, efforts to conserve, revive, renew, and document the Haida language have largely been sporadic, but recent efforts have been more sustained and have branched out into the fields of film and drama. The Haida nation along the northwestern coast of Canada and the southwestern coast of Alaska are innovators. They excel in wood, silver, gold and argillite carving, and north-west coast designs. They have led the way in land reclamation struggles, repatriation efforts, and cultural renewal. Now, in regards to the Haida language, the Haida Nation has led the way in documenting their own language using drama and film.

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<sup>2</sup> The salvific nature of Franz Boas' work ultimately reflected his notion, and a common one at the time, that the languages and cultures of the Indigenous population, if not the people themselves, would soon disappear. As a result, he trained linguists to learn, record, and classify as many North American Indigenous languages as possible. These efforts culminated in the publication of 1911 *Handbook of American Indian Languages* (Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 40, Part 1. and 1922, *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, (Bureau of American Ethnology), Bulletin 40, Part 2.

A brief history of the nation reveals that in the 1800s, the Haida population reached nearly 12,000 inhabitants of Haida Gwaii, Canada (Belshaw 2009). There were also about 1,000 Haidas in Alaska. As the century began its final quarter, small pox started to afflict the Canadian Haidas. As the disease decimated the population, by 1905, there were only 900 Haidas that survived the epidemic. With the loss of such a large percentage of the population, much of the culture was also lost. With the concurrent ban of the potlatch in 1884, the encroaching Euro-Canadian society slowly replaced Haida culture, especially in regards to the English language of wider communication. All of the Haidas at the beginning of the 20th century were native speakers of Haida, but as the decades ensued, the shift to English became the norm for the families. With the advent of the residential schools, the shift to English only was exacerbated by the numerous experiences of Haida children in the schools. Upon returning to their homes, many of the students' fluent Haida parents shifted to English, which had been occurring since the end of the small pox epidemic. While a few children were still learning Haida in the 1940s, by the 1950s, even those who learned Haida, when they became parents they also shifted to only English by the mid-1950s.

The result of this shift became apparent in the 1970s when those under 30 were fluent only in English, and very few understood any Haida, or at best, could say basic Haida terms for numbers, places, people or actions. The Kaigani Haida dialect in Alaska began a concerted effort to compile introductory Haida lessons, and eventually compiled the first Haida Dictionary.<sup>3</sup> There were sporadic recordings of events and narratives for all three dialects by various individuals, but nothing was concerted or systematic. There also were plenty of academic articles, and a few dissertations addressing various aspects of the Haida language, but these were largely for the academy.<sup>4</sup> Very little of the research had any value for the community itself since the audience for the research was rarely the Haida community.

Film has also played a large role in salvaging the Haida culture. The earliest known film occurred in the early 1900s when a silent film captured some Haida men maneuvering their canoes in the water. The purpose of the filming was to capture the skill and speed of the Haidas but also the stealth with which they executed their skills. A number of documentaries have also been made dealing with various aspects of Haida culture as well as legal issues they have been addressing at both the provincial and national levels. Still, capturing the Haida language on film has been a recent phenomenon. Film as a medium for capturing Indigenous cultures has been around since the inception of moving pictures. While Indigenous cultures have been part of those "documentive" efforts, Hollywood itself has eclipsed those efforts with its stereotyping of American Indigenous nations, along with their history, culture, and language. Suffice to say that reclaiming this medium has been a difficult enterprise, but there are many excellent examples of enduring achievements.<sup>5</sup>

The Haida have been dealing with land rights for a number of decades, and quite often, that has included issues with fishing rights, mineral rights, and other important

<sup>3</sup> Originally published in 1977 as the *Haida Dictionary*, Jordan Lachler recently updated the contents and republished it in 2010 *Dictionary of Alaskan Haida*.

<sup>4</sup> I have argued elsewhere that much of the earliest research on the Haida language did not benefit the Haida community as much as it benefited academia, see White (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Diamond's documentary *Reel Injun* (2009), captures the nature of Hollywood's negative impact on stereotyping, but also observes how Indigenous directors and producers have reclaimed the medium for positive portrayals of Indigenous peoples, cultures, and stories.

cultural aspects but did not include revitalizing their language.<sup>6</sup> Historically, addressing the number of Haida speakers has been a difficult issue given the three dialects—two in Canada: Massett, Skidegate; and one in Alaska, Kaigani, also referred to as Hydaburg—mainly because knowing who among the population was fluent has mostly been guess work. In the following section, I will expound upon the Haida language research and the efforts at revitalizing the language.

**2. HAIDA LANGUAGE, EARLY DOCUMENTATION, AND REVITALIZATION EFFORTS.** The Haida language is an isolate, unrelated to any other language in the world. It also has a very unique basic word order: object, subject, verb (OSV), shared with less than .01 percent of the languages of the world (Dryer 2013). According to Eastman and Edwards (1983:58), the sentence in (1) exemplifies this order:

- (1) *chiin*                *iiwaandaa*        *l*        *guulaagan*  
       fish                big                she       likes  
       ‘She likes big fish.’

But other scholars suggest that basic word order is SOV as the sentence in (2) from Swanton (1905:283) illustrates:

- (2) *Wa'Lui*            *hit!A'n*    *L!*        *stAñ*        *tcin*        *tc!a'anue*    *djIngu*    *isdai'an*  
       At that time    then        them    two of    salmon    the fire    near       had put  
       ‘Then two of them put salmon near the fire.’

In terms of the phonology of the language, different researchers have proposed various numbers of consonant and vowels, but the Haida have adopted a phonemic inventory that represents 40 consonants and 5 vowels plus 3 diphthongs.<sup>7</sup>

The Haida have inhabited the islands of Haida Gwaii for over 10,000 years. In the last 150 years, the impact of disease and colonization has devastated the Haida Nation and nearly destroyed the nation completely. Two cycles of smallpox occurred, the first within 15 years of the first contact with Europeans, which claimed two thirds of the population (Boyd 1999:26). In the 1850s when the second small pox plague began, the population on Haida Gwaii was just over 10,000 people. By the turn of the century, there were less than 900 people that survived (Boyd 1994:33). With the ensuing colonization, Canadian Government intervention in interposition of laws that forbid the potlatch celebration, as well as the advent of Residential Schools,<sup>8</sup> English became the dominant language. By the end of the 1920s, monolingual Haida speakers were rare, and within one generation, by the 1950s, parents no longer taught their children Haida. The shift to English as the language of wider communication culminated in the 1970s, but at that time a cultural renewal also began to focus on reviving the Haida language.

While the potlatch was eventually decriminalized 71 years after the Canadian Government assimilation policies made it illegal, this ban—not just on the Haidas, but

<sup>6</sup> Two important books on the subject of Haida Sovereignty include, Ian Gill, *All That We Say Is Ours: Guujaaw and the Reawakening of the Haida Nation*, Vancouver: Douglas and MacIntyre, (2009) and Mark Dowie, *The Haida Gwaii Lesson: A Strategic Playbook for Indigenous Sovereignty*. San Francisco: Ink Shares, 2017

<sup>7</sup> I will discuss the orthography issue in detail henceforth.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of First Nations experiences and history with residential schools, see Miller (2017).

all the coastal nations that observed this celebration—immediately and forever impacted the community.<sup>9</sup> While it is difficult to gauge which was worse, the residential schools were a much more concerted effort at cultural assimilation. The residential schools were relentless in removing all vestiges of Haida culture and language, and the atrocities suffered by the students in these schools have been formally addressed by the Canadian Government with a complete apology and monies for redressing the psychological impact on the students. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada summarized the impact of residential schools on the students and their families in their report, “The Commission is convinced that genuine reconciliation will not be possible until the complex legacy of the schools is understood, acknowledged, and addressed” (2015:136). That process of reconciliation began on June 11, 2008 when Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, offered these words, “The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. *Nous le regrettons*. We are sorry.” The address included apologies in three First Nations languages as well: *Nimitataynan* (Cree), *Niminchinow-esamin* (Anishinaabe), *Mamiattugut* (Inuktitut) (Cohen 2017:46).

The residential school approach (Armitage 1995:110; Benyon 2008:55; Heriman & Burnaby 1996:211; Patrick 2003:40) was driven by General Richard Henry Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School. He was integral in addressing a systematic effort to affect a national attitude against Indigenous culture. Pratt, who in 1892 spoke at a conference, proclaimed (Barrows 1892:46):

A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man.

Both these sentiments, “the only good Indian” and “kill the Indian in him,” continue to haunt First Nations and Native Americans students and their families to this day.<sup>10</sup> The Canadian government pursued the sentiment of “kill the Indian in him, and save the man” relentlessly and mercilessly among all the residential schools. Most notably, speaking the Indigenous language was forbidden, and often, when the first students returned to their communities, they could no longer communicate with their parents or grandparents since the students could only speak English and their parents or grandparents spoke only Haida. Those students who did remember Haida were too emotionally scarred to speak Haida anymore because their language was denigrated so much that if they did speak it, they felt dehumanized.

Rosa Bell (1995:10) captures this shift to English in her narrative about her residential school experience:

The government wanted to turn us into white people. Our cultural family units were broken apart. Also, part of becoming ‘white’ was to speak English. Because my parents also attended residential school, they didn’t see the value in

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed information about the potlatch, see Cole and Chaikin (1990).

<sup>10</sup> Much has been written about the Native American/First Nation student transition to formal schooling, see (Whyte 1986; Sindell 1974; Plank 1994; Philips 1983; and White 2008) for more discussion concerning Indigenous experiences of learning and participation in the classroom.

teaching us our language. The Indian Agent told them not to speak to their children in Haida because it would not help them in school. My parents spoke Haida with other adults but didn't make much effort to teach me. My grandma always spoke Haida to me and I tried hard to understand but it was foreign.

Thus, by the 1950s, the transition to English only was not simply a residential school effort, but also became a reality at home on the reserve as well, often as a result of the impact of the residential schools on children and their parents, as well as when those children eventually became parents themselves. By the 1960s in all three Haida communities, only some parents and most grandparents were bilingual, but children were largely monolingual English speakers.

From the 1880s to the 1990s, there were many different researchers working with the Haida language, documenting the phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics, often for the academic community. Rarely did the linguistic research ever have any benefit for the Haida community since the audience for the research was not the Haida people.<sup>11</sup> But this research culminated in a vast body of Haida language documentation, largely because the nature of the research was salvific. Beginning with Franz Boas (Rosenblum & Berez 2010) in the 1880s, the evaluation of the perpetuity of Native Americans was very bleak, so much so that Boas determined that it would be important to capture as much as possible from Indigenous languages before those who spoke it would become extinct. Boelscher (1989:4) explained:

Unlike British Social Anthropology, which in the early part of this century studied cultures functioning largely within their Indigenous context, American cultural anthropology from its beginning took salvage ethnography, recording what was left of traditional systems of ideas and values of North American Indians as they were being physically exterminated and socially assimilated by Whites.

While the linguistic salvage efforts were monumental—and the Haida language was definitely a target of those efforts—the approach and motivation were once again not necessarily benefiting the Indigenous communities. Instead, the efforts culminated in securing cultural and linguistic content, though ostensibly solely for the academic community.

While the Boasian efforts to salvage Indigenous languages did benefit the Haida language, one factor that still remains unresolved is the issue of orthography. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and subsequently into the early part of the 1910s, John Swanton began his effort to learn and record the Haida language (Swanton 1905; 1911).<sup>12</sup> Swanton was trained by Franz Boas and as part of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, he learned all three dialects of Haida in four years by spending two years on Haida Gwaii for the Massett and Skidegate dialects, then two years in Alaska with the Kaigani dialect. All the previous research that had been done—whether by missionaries (Keen 1906) or geological surveyors (Tolmie & Dawson 1884)—was overshadowed by the sheer volume that Swanton produced. Edward Sapir (1923) also offered his opinion of the Haida phonemic inventory concurrent to Swanton's work.

<sup>11</sup> I have addressed this issue of relevance in detail in White (2014).

<sup>12</sup> John Swanton was trained by Franz Boas and as part of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, he learned all three dialects of Haida in four years by spending two years on Haida Gwaii for the Massett and Skidegate dialects, then two years in Alaska with the Kaigani dialect.

Many subsequent researchers have modified Swanton's orthography, or Sapir's, or used a combination of both, or just developed their own. Most recently, John Enrico's research (Enrico 1980; 2005), which now rivals Swanton's grammatical and vocabulary collection, also adopted his own orthography, and with the publication of his two-volume dictionary, he is unequaled in contemporary efforts to document the Haida language. Officially, all three dialects have acknowledged the problematic issue of adopting orthography. Most recently, in anticipation of the 2009 Haida Language Conference, Kwiaahwah Jones commented on this quandary (2009:1):

A big *and* sensitive topic to tackle is the need for a common orthography. This discussion has been ongoing between Massett, Skidegate and Hydaburg for a few years, and the language conference hopes to take this topic a few steps along the path. As it stands today, there are at least three systems being used to spell and teach Haida.

Though the conference tried to resolve the issue, as of yet, there is no official orthography for the Haida language, each dialect unofficially adopting and utilizing an orthography to their liking.

As the 1970s ensued, there were sporadic community efforts at recording events where Haida discourse and narratives were occurring, but nothing systematic until the Kaigani Haidas in Alaska began compiling lessons plans and eventually a Haida dictionary. There were some people learning Haida songs and traditional dances, but since they did not know much, if any, of the language, the significance of the songs or dances remained obscured. In the 1980s, efforts in Canada began and culminated in having Haida taught in school, in both the Skidegate and Massett dialects, from Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Lesson plans, K-8 Haida curricula, and concerted efforts at recording fluent speakers ensued in both communities, but by then, the average age of the fluent speakers was late 50s or early 60s.

Once the 1990s arrived, most Haida language revitalization work relied on formal instruction in schools. Though there were also occasional immersion camps for second language learners, there was not much follow up for those who attended the camps. My own involvement began during this time and culminated in my dissertation addressing Haida student learning and participation styles in the classroom.<sup>13</sup> There were also a few linguists working with the language during this time, including the great accomplishment of John Enrico's eventual two-volume dictionary (Enrico 2005) which contains all three dialects. However, at the price of \$279.00 (US), the cost is prohibitive for the general Haida population to purchase.

**3. CURRENT STATE OF THE HAIDA LANGUAGE.** The history of documenting the number of Haida speakers has largely been a feat in guesswork since there has not been a consistent survey to record the number of speakers. Documentation that does exist often reflects only Haida speakers on Haida Gwaii. For some reason, Haida speakers living somewhere else other than Haida Gwaii seem to be inexplicably and consistently ignored. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with a population of about 1,000, all were fluent in Haida, including a small number of monolingual Haida speakers. In 1962, with the total population less than 4,000, Chafe (1962) estimated that there were 700 fluent Haida speakers, and of these he surmised that less than 100 were of the

<sup>13</sup> I eventually published the dissertation in 2008.

Skidegate dialect, the majority being over 50 years old. Fourteen years later, in 1976, Michael Krauss estimated the total number of Haida speakers, Massett and Skidegate dialects, was under 50 (Krauss 1976:317). The 2006 Statistics Canada Census recorded 125 Haida speakers, but did not delineate the dialects. But again, while the Statistics Canada Census numbers are higher than the 1976 Krauss estimation, it is still difficult to determine how many of the 125 Haida speakers are Massett or Skidegate.

Table 1 shows the most recent population numbers reported for the three dialects. The numbers for Massett and Skidegate speakers represent data from the First People's Language Map (2018) and Gilpin (2018). The Alaska population numbers are based on Krauss (2007:408), mainly from Hydaburg, and the Kaigani language data is from Lachler's (2010:7) most recent update of the Kaigani Haida Dictionary. In Alaska there are no reservations due to the Alaska Native Claims settlement of 1971 and in Canada, the 'accepted' term is not reservation, but 'reserve.'<sup>14</sup> The number of those whose first language is Haida represented by FS, and the number of those speaking Haida as a second language is represented by 2LS.

TABLE 1: Numbers of Haida speakers

	On reserve	Off reserve	FS	2LS
Massett (Haida Gwaii, Canada)	751	2192	4	22
Skidegate (Haida Gwaii, Canada)	740	869	18	40
Kaigani (Alaska)	~650	5	7	-

While it seems logical that the number of Haida speakers would reflect only on-reserve data—since both Skidegate and Massett serve as the loci for the language reclamation efforts—there are many speakers that live in Prince Rupert, Terrace, Vancouver, and Seattle. However, the number of people living 'off island' is hard to determine,<sup>15</sup> and therefore ascertaining the number of first language Haida speakers not living on Haida Gwaii is even more difficult.

**4. UPDATED REVITALIZATION EFFORTS.** The recent Haida efforts seem to be more unified than in the past. By the start of the new millennium, Haida efforts had closely followed the four major documentative periods noted by Henke and Berez-Kroeker (2016:412):

- An early period, lasting from before the time of Boas and Sapir until the early the 1990s, in which analog materials—everything from paper documents and wax cylinders to magnetic audio tapes—were collected and deposited by researchers into physical repositories that were not easily accessible to other researchers or speaker communities;

<sup>14</sup> The settlement essentially was a buyout of any further land claims from any of the Indigenous population in Alaska, each group receiving a share of the settlement, and ostensibly foregoing any rights to their traditional land or a reservation. For more information about the Alaska Native claims, visit, [http://www.alaskool.org/projects/ancsa/reports/rsjones1981/ancsa\\_history71.htm](http://www.alaskool.org/projects/ancsa/reports/rsjones1981/ancsa_history71.htm)

<sup>15</sup> "Off island" is a local term that refers to Haidas that do not live on Haida Gwaii, the politics of which are not conducive for discussion here.

- A second period, beginning in the 1990s, in which increased attention to language endangerment and language documentation brought about a redefined focus on the preservation of languages and language data;
- A third period, starting in the early twenty-first century, in which technological advancements, concerted efforts to develop standards of practice, and largescale financial support of language documentation projects made archiving a core component of the documentation workflow;
- The current period, in which conversations have arisen toward expanding audiences for archives and breaking traditional boundaries between depositors, users, and archivists.

In 1998, some of the Skidegate elders serendipitously began an immersion program for preschool students with fluent elders. More focused efforts then began to record elders in conversation and narratives in all three dialect communities, as well as transcribing the recordings and compiling a database of spoken and written materials. Academic research among the Haida at this time began with stipulations that the results had to benefit the communities first and foremost, not just the researcher. Henke and Berez-Kroeker also observe that, “Indigenous communities in the United States, Canada, and Australia have been taking much more active roles in archiving their cultural heritage” (2016:424), and we have seen such active roles instantiated with the recent Haida efforts concerning their language.

Language nests have also become part of the Haida language revitalization efforts, where fluent speakers intentionally meet with infants and children and interact only in Haida (Daniels 2017). The Haida language nests try to pair both children and their parents with fluent speakers. Lockyer (2009:4) explains:

The Language Nest is open to all parents and their young children; it is designed to help the parent learn alongside their children so that our language can be used more at home and in the community. A learner needs to practice the language with another speaker and so the practice of teaching parents and children is a good way to begin, as parents and children can use their new words in a variety of settings.

Thus, the nests have become intergenerational, not just with elder and child, but with the child’s parents as well. Concomitant with the language nests, linguistic ideologies also “envision and enact links of language to group and personal identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:55–6). So while learning the Haida language in the language nest setting, participants develop bonds not only to the language, but to their identity and history as well.

There have also been sporadic elder/learner mentorships for younger and even older adult Haida language learners to meet with fluent elders for Haida language instruction (Lockyer 2009; Daniels 2017). With the whole island community so interested in the Haida language, a concerted community effort has made all the signs on Haida Gwaii bilingual, English and Haida. Current signs, whether a street sign, highway sign, or points of interest, have both Haida and English. This, along with the name of the islands, Haida Gwaii, is part of the reclamation of cultural ownership of the land and a reversion to the original names for islands, mountains, rivers, creeks, valleys, and well-



known tourist sites, such as *hlGaa K'aayhlina* 'sitting rock,' formerly known as 'balance rock.' The Haida Gwaii newsletter, *Haida Laas*,<sup>16</sup> has had issues dedicated to the Haida language revitalization efforts, and regularly features language snippets in both Massett and Skidegate dialects.

Since the early 1990s, well into the digital age, technology has increasingly affected documentation efforts for the Haida as well as many other endangered languages. There some basic considerations and responsibilities that Fenyevisi (2014:261) observes:

The basic realm where responsibility lies is the creation and/or strengthening of the digital presence of endangered languages, that is, the creation of digital content available in the endangered languages. This is, of course, highly dependent on the endangered language speakers and their willingness and opportunity to create and support the digital presence of their own language.

Most important is the comment concerning willingness, and right now, the Haida fluent speakers are most willing to participate in efforts to bring Haida back into use, even if as a second language. The Haida elders' willingness is seemingly only limited to the innovations and enthusiasm of those who want to learn, document, or teach the Haida language. The elders are showing greater enthusiasm as they interact with linguists and also greater prestige in learning and speaking Haida within their communities.

Technology has overall been favorable in the Haida efforts to document and revitalize their language.<sup>17</sup> Since the arrival of personal computers, and the subsequent introduction of audio programs, individual efforts to record Haida terms, phrases, and narratives have captured all aspects of Haida language, though not necessarily systematically, nor contained within a singular location as an archival depository. An example of this current technology, as Ramsey (2017: 9) notes, is "iPods and iPads, with 2,000 Haida words and phrases written and paired with audio recordings of elders speaking the word." The use of computers and various programs has allowed recording and manipulation of data in ways that simply having a hard copy via typewriters could not do, even programs such as Microsoft Word or the newly developed "XK App" which is short for *Xaad Kil* 'Speak Haida.'

**5. THE RISE OF HAIDA FILM AND DRAMA.** In 2008, drama began as a medium to reclaim the language when the brothers and Haida artists (wood carving, print, and silver and gold jewelry), Jaalen Edenshaw and Gwaii Edenshaw co-wrote a play entitled *Sinxii'gangu* 'Sounding Gambling Sticks.' Their father, Guujaaw, is a Haida elder, former president of the Council of the Haida Nation, and also an artist who worked with Bill Reid, the world-renown Haida carver and artist. Guujaaw's leadership as president of the Council of the Haida Nation afforded Jaalen and Gwaii opportunities to observe their father instantiate efforts to prioritize Haida language and culture, as well as to watch and learn carving from him. Jaalen had been studying political science at the University of Victoria when a professor approached him with the proposal to write a play, including some funding. Given the unique opportunity, he assented to the idea of writing a play in Haida, even though he had never written any play before.

<sup>16</sup> The archives for *Haida Laas* are available at [http://www.haidanation.ca/?page\\_id=66](http://www.haidanation.ca/?page_id=66).

<sup>17</sup> See White (2014:141-151) for a more detailed discussion of technology and Haida language documentation and revitalization efforts.

The Edenshaw brothers chose to dramatize a legend recorded by John Swanton about a young man who had lost his village and family in a gambling wage. The story took place when supernatural beings commonly interacted with humans. The didactic storyline highlighted the hubris of the young man who had gambled away his family and community and his transformation to humility and subsequent journey to win his family back from the supernatural beings. As he was writing the play, Jaalen had three questions that motivated him (Davies 2008:8): How do you make people aware of the language? How do people become more interested in learning it? How can you bring the language into use in different ways? These questions then guided his, and his brother's writing process.

He originally began writing the play in English and then garnered the help of three Massett elders, Mary Swanson, Stephen Brown and Norma Adams, to translate the script into Haida. The process began to weary him, so he invited his brother to help him complete the task. Jaalen Edenshaw reported, "the toughest thing about putting on *Sinxii'gangu* was keeping it going over many years—five to be precise" (Davies 2008:13). When they had the first draft completed in both English and then Haida, they translated the Haida back into English, and then began the process again to refine the dialogue and the final Haida version. When the play premiered on Haida Gwaii, in a personal communication to me, Jaalen indicated that both Haida communities received the play very well and that students were reciting lines from the play months after they had seen it. A DVD version was also made available for the community after they premiered the play in Massett and Skidegate.

Film has also become a major vehicle in language documentation and efforts to revitalize the Haida language. The technological environment we inhabit now forces new perspectives on documenting endangered languages, and though not limited only to language and cultural renewal, some film documentaries specifically address issues of Haida sovereignty and issues of land, air, and sea rights.<sup>18</sup> As part of the effort to record traditional oral and contemporary narratives, some of that energy has been applied to stop motion films. For the stop motion film topics, often there are two versions, one in Haida with Haida subtitles, and others provide English subtitles. The films are available on YouTube.com under the user channel of Haidawood.<sup>19</sup>

Another unique opportunity arose for the Edenshaw brothers in 2015 when they began working on a movie script completely in Haida, both Massett and Skidegate dialects. They found a story situated in the nineteenth century that they wanted to capture on film, and they envisioned its positive, long term impact on the Haida community. Based on a Haida proverb, "The world is as sharp as the edge of a knife," the movie is called *SGaawaay K'uuna Edge of the Knife*. The story concerns *Adiits'ii*, who, as the lone survivor of a disaster at sea, transforms into *gaagiiid* (Masset dialect) / *gaagiixid* (Skidegate dialect)—a wild man. After losing everything, he makes it to shore and survives wildly for a year. The impact of his tragedy affects the whole Haida community and when his community returns to the site of the disaster, a range of emotions affect them until they realize he may still be alive and that he might

<sup>18</sup> Titles such as *Haida Gwaii: Damned If We Don't*, 2012, directed by Lynda Dixon; *Haida Gwaii: On the Edge of the World*, 2015, directed by Charles Wilkinson; *Haida Gwaii: Restoring the Balance*, 2015, directed by Bruce Marchfelder, all offer insight to cultural issues that the Haida have to live with and deal with on a daily basis, including land claims, logging, fishing, and mineral rights, and even reclaiming past Haida traditions.

<sup>19</sup> The stop motion video titles include *Golden Spruce*, *Nuu Story*, *Taaw story*, *Haida Raid* series (four different episodes), and *Yaani K'uuka*.

be *gaagiiid/gaagiixid*. They then plan to capture him and begin his restoration back into the community. Since the wild man's trial encompassed experiences with both Massett and Skidegate communities, the script contained both dialects.

**5. REFLECTIONS ON HAIDA DRAMA AND FILM.** The history of drama and film on Haida Gwaii reveals a very important aspect of language revitalization and documentation, and that is the impact of restoring prestige in the language. Interestingly, restoring prestige in the Haida language was not a goal for the Edenshaw brothers, but that restoration of prestige was an integral component that accompanied both the drama and film production and performances. Mufwene (2003:343) suggested that such restoration is an integral step for endangered language revitalization, and this has been confirmed with the Haida community. Drama and film have positively affected documentation efforts for all those involved but have also inspired the rest of the community as a result of the excitement of seeing and hearing the Haida language beyond typical settings of official community meetings or schools.

With the positive impact on prestige for the Haida language, both the drama and movie offer other very practical opportunities for practicing the Haida language. Typical language learning scenarios usually offer the language in school settings, and often dialogue is not a focus as much as learning narratives, often traditional. While oral narration provides language practice, dialogue provides authentic elements of conversation including turn taking and even interruption, as well as intergenerational interaction with others who are practicing and learning the language.

Drama and film thus offer Haida language learning and use beyond the school classroom. Too often, the bulk of revitalization efforts remain in the classroom as the younger community members learn the language. The drama and film have taken the Haida language out of the classroom and brought it back into the community. These drama and film efforts, which also have documented the Haida language in two completely new venues, have also renewed interest in the Haida culture, not just the Haida language. The play addressed a favorite pass time—that of playing gambling games—but it also brought in Haida cosmology and human interaction with supernatural beings.

Both the performance and screening of the drama and film offered new media for transmitting not only the Haida language to the greater community, but also capturing and revisiting culturally significant material such as local history, mythology, and cultural norms. For both the play and the film, much of the language material was new, as were the history and mythology, and the fluent elders guided the writers, actors, and producers through both the Haida language and cultural materials. The elders' guidance often was one-on-one, from script-writing, to the learning of the lines, to the final product of performance for the play or the film.

What the movie includes, besides the storyline, is often not part of most efforts at documenting a language—conversation. What usually happens in most typical language documentation scenarios is an elder agrees to tell stories and is then video/audio recorded. The structure, then, of the language is in narrative form with reported speech throughout the story.<sup>20</sup> While this type of documentation—recording one person speaking, usually an elder—has been the *modus operandi* since audio documentation began, it does not capture the nuances of language interaction between individuals in authentic conversation, especially in regards to suprasegmentals—prosody, intonation, and even

<sup>20</sup> I have dealt with this issue of recording narrative versus conversation extensively in other publications, including White 2014, White 2008, and White 2006.

stress. The movie provides that basis for both types of language use—stories and conversation. Brandon Kallio, the movie’s main character, captures the nuances his own language learning effort as a result of participation in the film, “It opened my eyes to think that there’s hope that even older guys can start to learn this stuff, and that’s a big thing” (Stewart 2017:6). The movie also incorporates other elements important in capturing Haida culture, and these include traditional ways of travelling, gathering food, diet, tattoos, singing, and dancing.

One challenge of the script process was getting the nuances of Haida language, in both dialects, and then having the actors portray those elements in their delivery of the lines. Another problem was that of all 41 actors, directors, and writers participating in the movie, only two actually were fluent. A two-week Haida language boot camp was set apart for the actors to practice and learn Haida and memorize their lines. The actors had access to elders to guide and offer assistance in the efforts to produce the Haida sounds and words accurately. Some actors admitted to needing not only linguistic tutoring, but emotional nurturing as well since many of the actors were struggling with the psychosocial factors of trying to speak a language they had never learned, and then coming to terms with the history of why they never learned the language in the first place (Lederman 2017). The process—both of the immersion camp and acting in the movie—birthed emotions that many of the actors had never experienced, thus affecting not only their delivery of the lines, but the very process of learning them as well. Some of the props had to be collected rather than made from scratch, which also provided more practice with the Haida language in traditional settings. In a report on the Council of the Haida Nation website, Graham Richard noted that a large team of craftspeople had been integral in securing, “*k’ay* (crab apples), *hlGaajuu* (drying racks), *ts’iihlintsaaw* (devil’s club)... Additional team-members are digging *k’yuu* (clams), gathering *sGyuu* (red laver seaweed), and catching *chiina* (fish)” (Richard 2017: para. 7). Procuring these items further emphasized Haida language use in specific contexts and for specific purposes.

The field of language documentation has grown immensely since Boas undertook the salvific efforts in the late 1890s well into the 1930s, especially now with the focus on video recordings. Tagliamonte (2017:28) explains the importance of both single speaker recordings and recorded conversational interactions:

Conversational interactions, storytelling and life stories are insightful for tapping linguistic features that may not arise other than in usage. Single speakers can exhibit variation that they, themselves, are entirely unaware of and would not admit to using. Spoken language contains discourse-pragmatic phenomena and other features not found in any other register of language. Finally, vernacular language offers unique insights into history, culture, identity and other social and psychological characteristics.

The writing process and the performances of the play and film offered practice in Haida language variation and discourse-pragmatic phenomena that do not occur in simple narratives. These aspects also provided opportunities for cultural insights to history and identity because of the sustained engagement with the Haida language.

The following points summarize the direct impacts the drama and film projects have had on both Haida documentation and Haida language revitalization efforts:

- Restoring prestige for the Haida language

- Providing practice with the Haida language
- Offering language of Haida conversation
- Providing intergenerational Haida language interaction
- Offering Haida language use beyond the school classroom
- Providing a useful media for capturing, using, and transmitting Haida language to the community
- Capturing culturally significant content as the writers research their topics with close interaction and verification with fluent elders

The impact of the first point—restoring prestige—is quite likely to be the most profound in its impact, since without this important psychological factor, restoration efforts would be in vain because they would lack the community support and interest. From the restoration of prestige, the rest of the benefits follow naturally, but not necessarily without some pain. The Haida community, as a whole, has to be supportive of the reclamation, documentation, and revitalization efforts, otherwise it would simply be pockets of disunified efforts amounting to marginal impact on the community.

The efforts at revitalizing any language have to be broad and innovative (Fenyvesi 2014; Henke & Berez-Kroeker 2016; Nagy 2017; Stewart 2017). What works best for any particular language may be unique to that language and community, and with the Haida, the most recent efforts of drama and film are having great impact on both documentation and revitalization. With the status of the Haida language essentially transitioning to a second language for its speakers, contemporary efforts—unified and focused as well as innovative—not only document the language, but encourage its learners as they learn, use, and transmit the language to others.

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Frederick White  
frederick.white@sru.edu